



Jean Todt, President
Federation Internationale de l'Automobile (FIA)

8, Place de la Concorde
75008 Paris
France

27 March 2019

Dear Jean Todt,

We, the undersigned organisations, write to draw your attention to the human rights and press freedom violations committed by the Bahraini authorities, including against people protesting the Bahrain Grand Prix.

The Bahraini Government attaches great importance to the Bahrain Grand Prix as a glamor status symbol of progress and international prestige. For this reason, the race has become a focal point for protests calling for political reform as well as a pretext for the authorities to further crack down on free speech and assembly.

Leading human rights organisations have documented the spike in human rights abuses that occur each year around the time of the race. The Bahraini government uses such events, and the lack of global concern about such abuses, to sanitise—or “sports-wash”—its image abroad while continuing to abuse its citizens domestically.

Since 2015, Formula One has had a human rights statement, [which it adopted after a mediation process](#) when Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain (ADHRB) filed a [complaint](#) in the United Kingdom, where the main Formula One companies are based, under the [OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises](#). The guidelines [emphasise the corporate responsibility](#) to carry out human rights due diligence and cooperate with legitimate processes in remediating impacts they have caused or contributed to. Its [“Statement of Commitment to Respect for Human Rights”](#) pledges: “*The Formula 1 companies are committed to respecting internationally recognised human rights in its operations globally.*”

One case of Bahraini abuse is the imprisoned mother of four and Bahraini activist, Najah Yusuf, who was arbitrarily arrested and said she was tortured and sexually assaulted a week after Facebook posts criticising the 2017 Bahrain Grand Prix were published on an account she co-managed.

The posts in question called for “No to Formula races on occupied Bahraini land,” and criticised the Bahrain Grand Prix for being “nothing more than a way for the al-Khalifa family to whitewash

their criminal record and gross human rights violations”. They also called for a “Freedom for the Formula 1 Detainees” march to put the spotlight on protestors jailed for criticising the Bahrain Grand Prix. These posts were all included in the evidence submitted by the Public Prosecution against her, and her social media activity opposing the Grand Prix was referenced in her court judgement.

Formula One publicly [expressed concern](#) in November 2018 about Ms. Yusuf’s case. The Bahraini Government continues to claim that her arrest and conviction “has nothing to do” with her protest of the Grand Prix. The Bahraini Government made similar claims in relation to other high-profile political prisoners, including Bahraini human rights defender Nabeel Rajab and the family members of Bahraini pro-democracy activist Sayed Ahmed Alwadaei. Both Rajab and Alwadaei were present during the OECD mediation process that led to Formula One adopting its human rights policy in 2015.

Moreover, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists, there are several reporters serving prison sentences who were arrested for activities and coverage related to the event. [Ahmed Humaidan is a priority case](#) due to his deteriorating health and because the timing of his prison sentence appeared to be related to the run-up to the race in 2014. The [arrest of Sayed Ahmed al-Mosawi](#) also appears to be linked to an effort to restrict protests and journalism in the lead up to the race in 2014. It is noteworthy that award-winning photographer [Mohammad al-Sheikh](#) was also detained shortly before the race in 2017. Together there is a [clear pattern of repression and detention of journalists](#) and restriction of press freedom by the Bahraini authorities around the races.

With the 2019 Bahrain Grand Prix fast approaching, we suggest Formula One take immediate action on these cases by:

- a. Publicly calling for Ms. Yusuf and Mr. Humaidan’s immediate and unconditional release; and
- b. Sending a high-level delegation from Formula One and Fédération Internationale de l'Automobile (FIA) leaders to visit Ms. Yusuf and Ahmed Humaidan in Isa Town Prison and Jau Prison, which are only 20 km and 24 km away from Bahrain’s International Circuit, respectively. This is consistent with the actions of other sports federations, for example, FIFA’s sending senior staff to monitor the hearing in Thailand of Bahraini refugee footballer Hakeem al-Araibi.

Sincerely,

- 1.Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain (ADHRB)
- 2.Bahrain Centre for Human Rights (BCHR)
- 3.Bahrain Institute for Rights and Democracy (BIRD)
- 4.Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ)
- 5.European Centre for Democracy and Human Rights (ECDHR)
- 6.Football Supporters Europe
- 7.Gulf Centre for Human Rights (GCHR)
- 8.Human Rights Watch (HRW)
- 9.International Service for Human Rights (ISHR)
- 10.International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC)
- 11.PEN International
- 12.Reporters Without Borders (RSF)
- 13.Transparency International Germany
- 14.Women's March Global
- 15.World Players Association, UNI Global Union

Copy to Ms. Sacha Woodward-Hill, General Counsel to F1